

Re-organisation of the Sri Lankan Buddhist Family and the Restoration of its Basic Values

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We are of the conviction that what is normally held to be a family should form the smallest unit to which human society can be fragmented without serious damage to its basic organic structure. English dictionaries define it briefly as ' a set of parents and children or of relations, living together or not || the members of a household, esp. parents and their children.'

In Buddhist thinking too, we begin the family with the parents [a man and a woman who are already agreed to be life-long partners] whose joint participation is accepted as summoning the arrival of children. It is no secret that in terms of Buddhist thinking, unmarried mothers and fatherless homes in society imply a tragic looseness in domestic relationships. They could not stand up to a count down, in space age thinking, in order to be put into orbit for successful social operation.

It is on this basis that Buddhism proceeds to build up the successfully operating family which works in total harmony as far as parents and children are concerned. In talking of the operational harmony of the home, it is said that the guarantee of the parent-children bond of affection works like the pin that keeps the wheels of a running chariot from flying off from the axel [*rathassāṇī ' va yāyato*].

It is the parents, it must be remembered, and not the children, who must commence this forward journey in society. Parents have first to play the host to their children. For children are to be looked upon as invited honoured guests. In their early age, children are as helpless as strangers in the new world into which they have come. Their needs in terms of food and clothing are to be adequately looked into by the parents. Keeping in mind this delicate position of the new

arrivals into the family, Buddhism introduces the set of ' four basics of adequate care ' [*cattāri saṅgaha-vatthūni = satara samgraha vastu*] of children.

The first of these is *dāna* or what we referred to above as provision of adequate food and clothing, Second comes 'loving words' or *peyyavajja*. This is parental affection and kindness. Supply of material needs is not all that children require in a home from their parents. Children must always feel that they are wanted and are cared for by those who brought them on the scene [*āpādakā*]. This awareness of parental love towards them by the children make them reciprocate a great deal of it back to their parents.

The third is *atthacariyā* or counselling of children by the parents. This is by no means rigid legislation [coupled with punishment] by parents regarding the behaviour of children. This must come more in the form of kind and friendly guidance, guidance from persons, who in the eyes of the children must appear amply qualified to provide it. The children, with their sensibility according to their age, must necessarily accept the seniority and the accompanying maturity of their parents. But we know reliably well that, at times, some parents fall lamentably far below this level. Children are known to challenge the behaviour of their parents as being comparably far inferior. Heaven forbid. The infliction of punishment should first be on the parent, mother or father for not being exemplary.

The fourth referred to as *samānattatā*, we choose to translate as ' emotional mobility.' This means the ability of parents to adjust themselves to the emotional fluctuations of their children in situations of joy and sadness, i.e. comfort and discomfort [*sukha* and *dukkha*]. This adjustability of parents to the emotional needs of their children gives the children, in turn, a greater degree of self-confidence and an assuring depth of security.

With such a wealth of counselling on the rearing of children, we feel that Buddhism could provide an enviably rich background for correcting and resetting some of our social malaise, specially in relation to our teen age children and their

parents.

At the Narada Center at 380 / 9 Sarana Road, Off Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7, we have already set up a monthly get-together of parents and children, meeting on every 1st Sunday of the month at 3.30 p.m. Gathering has to be limited to about 30 persons in all, both parents and children. Each parent may bring upto 3 children. It would be appreciated if each group could bring a plateful of somethings for the children to eat [like sandwiches, cakes, kavum or gingelly balls].

It is our belief that this kind of get-together would enable 1. young people of similar ages to meet a wide range of others from different schools, different backgrounds and thereby ease their tensions in a very healthy way. Also enable 2. parents of very many different temperaments and aptitudes to meet and discuss common problems with regard to their children.

Any parent interested in this project may telephone 689388 and inform Bhante Dhammavihari about their willingness to join any of the get-togethers. In his absence, please leave your name and address, together with your telephone number, indicating the number of persons who would join.